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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a proposed alternative public high school, the Metropolitan Corporate Academy, a joint project of private and public institutions including the New York City Public Schools and designed to serve at-risk students. An overview notes the high New York City dropout rate and the fragmented nature of most of the programs offered in the traditional school system. The proposed school would offer a program of early intervention, outcome-based curriculum, and assessment, designed as an environment committed to self-esteem and actualization of students and staff. Also discussed are the proposed goals of seeing that students assume roles in business, financial services, public services, and entrepreneurship with optimal experience-based education. A curriculum overview section describes the program that will include a full high school diploma sequence in the following series of learning strands: (1) experiential strand (career exploration and external learning projects); (2) in-house learning modules (designed as a result of a definition of student outcomes); and (3) resources recruited to augment the first two strands (a range of business, cultural, and health related resources and programs). Other sections describe the school's target population, the Cities-In-Schools support and enrichment model, a mission statement, and parental involvement goals. (JB)

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METROPOLITAN CORPORATE ACADEMY

AN ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL FOR BUSINESS/FINANCE AND PUBLIC SERVICES

OVERVIEW

With fewer than 60 percent of New York City students completing high school within the traditional four years and a four-year drop-out rate of nearly 28 percent, virtually all entering high school students can be considered at "high risk." Socially, at "high risk" may be defined as disconnected from a host of social and educational systems and services. The same students who exhibit academic under-achievement also exhibit alienation from the school, sporadic attendance, low self-esteem, and affect. They often come from fragile families, which lie outside of the economic mainstream.

Traditional programs to meet the needs of these students are often fragmented and limited. A large school routes a student among six or seven subject-area teachers during a day; support services are delivered by as many as five counselors, social workers, or other school personnel, who often do not communicate with one another. More broadly, the responses of municipal government may be equally as fragmented. As each specific problem is identified, the family or student must interface with a new person, perhaps representing a new bureaucracy. And finally, the student may receive no articulated, continuous prepration for employment or life after school.

The Metropolitan Corporate Academy represents a union of the public and private sectors. Cities-In-Schools has a national reputation for its commitment to early intervention drop-out prevention strategies and programs. The educational resources of the Alternative High School Superintendency provides cutting edge ideas in outcome based curriculum and assessment design as well as an environment committed to self esteem and actualization for both students and staff. Goldman-Sachs provides a wealth of experiental resources including mentoring, internship placements and access to additional sites.

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As both New York City and the school system become increasingly minority, it is also clear that the school system must also take a role in seeing that its students-- who represent the next generation to operate the city-- increasingly assume roles in business, in financial services-related sectors of the economy, in the public services, which have proven the "ladder into the middle class" for previous minority and immigrant populations. Entrepreneurship must also be a target goal for New York's minority students.

MCA will stand for optimal experience-based education whether the experience takes place in the world of business, culture or academia. The culture of this school will be defined by a tapestry of experiences starting within the confines of the school but very quickly expanding to the community, urban culture, and career path of each student.

The Metropolitan Corporate Academy represents a unique opportunity to combine a host of educational and collaborative approaches which too often come to students only as part of the "fragmentation" outlined above. CIS has successfully developed a plan for delivering educational and social services to at-risk youth. The CIS concept and model recognize that problems that students evidence in school are often a reflection of problems at home. By focusing on the underlying family issues that contribute to students dropping out-- and by providing additional support services in the schools, the program is able to help families obtain the services they need and the students develop self-esteem, increase school attendance and improve academic performance. In addition, while hundreds of programs that attempt to link students with business and industry (internships, mentoring, part-time and summer employment), very few attempts are made to link these programs so that they focus longitudinally and sequentially on individual students. Finally, not a single school or program in the city sets out systematically to prepare students for entry into public service employment at any level, and the Cities in Schools model represents a unique opportunity to develop such a systematic program. For all students, of course, college preparation would remain a goal, since virtually all alternative high school students have aspirations to pursue higher education; the present program hopes to prepare students with occupational skills suitable for supporting themselves while in college.

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

The Metropolitan Corporate Academy will be an alternative high school for students at risk. While student-progress will be measured by other means than "grade-level promotion", the academy will offer a full high school diploma sequence. MCA's curriculum will consist of a series of learning strands which, when woven together, will form the profile of the MCA graduate.

Strand I - THE EXPERIENTIAL STRAND

A. Career Exploration

MCA students will be able to choose one of the following exploration options.

1. Business/Finance
2. Public Service

This choice will be made in the upper freshman term during career orientation seminar classes.

Each career exploration will have three levels (see chart). The first is a mentoring experience designed to introduce a career to the student and to develop a support relationship with someone in that field which will continue throughout the student's high school experience and hopefully beyond that time. The second level is a mini-internship that exposes the student to a range of alternatives in that field (the cluster) or sub-field. This is the student's first hands-on in-depth exposure to the career area. Immediately following that exposure is one that allows the student to narrow down his/her interests in the field. This is called a focused exposure. In the upper junior semester students spend an entire half day (every day) focusing on one specific job description, e.g. systems analyst, bank teller, HRA case worker. The senior year allows the student full day, then full-time career exploration and/or college immersion. A student may opt to spend the last semester(s) exploring the college experience. In addition to earning credit in college courses the student will establish a rapport with a university mentor. The role of the mentor will be to guide MCA students through the new paradigm of college.

CAREER EXPLORATION OVERVIEW

CYCLE	LEARNING MODULE	LM 2	LM 3	LM 4	LM 5
	(Each LM = 70 min.)				
1					
2					
3					
4	Personal & Career Development Seminar				
5	Mentoring	Career Seminar			
6	Mentoring	Shadowing	Career Seminar		
7	Rotating Internship	Cluster Exposure	Career Seminar		
8	Rotating Internship	Cluster Exposure	Career Seminar		
9	Rotating Internship	Focused Exposure	Career Seminar		
10	Rotating Internship	Focused Exposure	Career Seminar		
11	Concentrated Internship and Career Seminar	Half Day	Student Planned Presentations for Cycles 4 & 5		
12	Concentrated Internship and Career Seminar	Half Day	Student Planned Presentations for Cycles 4 & 5		
13	Directed Full Day Internship/or College Immersion				
14	Directed Full Day Internship/or College Immersion				
15	Executive H.S. Internship Program - Full Time/or College Immersion				
16	Executive H.S. Internship Program - Full Time/or College Immersion				

Each level of career exploration is credit bearing and credit is determined by the nature of work and the activities and skills accomplished, all of which is driven by outcomes.

Strand I - EXPERIENTIAL

B. External Learning Projects

1. Learning modules that take place outside of school but are not defined as career exploration, e.g. a botany project at the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens for which a student may earn science credit.

2. Learning modules that originate outside of MCA but take place at the school, e.g. in-training courses given at business sites for employees could be offered to students and parents. The key to this "translation" is the utilization of existing external/experiential curricula, which links demonstrated skills to exit outcomes.

Strand II - IN-HOUSE LEARNING MODULES

Curriculum/Assessment models designed as a result of definition of student outcomes. In turn, those outcomes are a result of school mission and input from students, staff and parents.

Learning modules may be planned and taught through an interdisciplinary approach. Critical to any curriculum at MCA is the belief that all students can learn and that all students must be engaged in each and every learning setting. That engagement may take the form of cooperative learning and/or activity based achievement.

The Curriculum Planning Team has decided to utilize a "conceptual" approach to in-house curriculum organization. Concepts will be defined as organizing themes, e.g. Conflict and Resolution, as applied to Global History of Science. That team shall be charged with the "translation" of alternative modes of assessment, e.g. projects, portfolio, etc. into the traditional credit scheme. The key to this "translation" is the utilization of existing external/experiential curricula, which links demonstrated skills to exit outcomes.

MCA may look at curriculum, to quote Steve Phillips, as sum total of experiences a student has in the school. As the school is committed to collaboration, and students will elect to attend MCA out of interest in pursuing experiences in various environments within the fields of business, finance, public service, arts and culture, the curriculum at MCA needs to reflect both a respect for collaboration, choice and the ability to make connections between work in the classroom and students' experiences in the world of work.

The curriculum then, both experiential and academic, must help the student develop skills that allow her/him to work well with others and think independently, both to be able to discover connections between different activities, ideas, problems, tasks and to make responsible decisions affecting his education, well being and career development. Courses of study then, might try to unify disciplines thematically, over a given period to time. For example, courses may be offered that integrate the study of literature and history and the development of writing skills, while focusing on a specific problem or theme that runs through the chosen subject matter. Such courses might be as follows:

-- Identity, Culture and Change -- beginning with autobiographical writing, interviewing, and personal narrative, students would explore how they see themselves, their families, and the culture with which they identify. Students would learn from each other as well as from texts, about the various ethnic groups and cultures that are represented in the student group as well as in American society. From this students would branch out to learn about other individuals, famous, fictitious and otherwise, and how they have developed, asserted their identity and estalished or changed their relationships within American culture and society. While we may decide at MCA that students should choose, to the greatest extent possible, their academic program, this

may be an apporpriate way to begin, perhaps viewed as an orientation course to provide entry into other courses of study.

-- Pursuing the American Dream -- could examine through history, literature, the arts, the various ways americans have pursued economic well being and the conflicts and obstacles that they have experienced along the way. Over a semester, historical topics integrated through the course might range from the struggle for independence from England to labor unions to the emergence of large coporations.

-- Justice, Law and Power -- might examine the constitution of the United States, compare it to other systems, analyze how it works, how it services or diminishes justice, might look at constitutional struggles across history, and again through literature and art, examine how various groups and individuals have pursued or been denied justice or access to power, how and why laws, morals, power relationships change.

Other possibilities might include the following:

-- Conflict, War and Peace --
-- Family dynamics, health, human biology --
-- Progress and pollution --

Curriculum is not static, it is continually evolving in response to the needs and interests of students, as perceived by teachers, students and parents. Students can see, on their own or with the help of staff, the relevance of the material to their own living situations and or their intellectual growth and development. As long as basic principles are upheld, any subject may be studied with a positive effect on the skills and intellectual growth of our students.

Through all courses these several principles will be upheld:

1. Habits of mind: Ways of fostering thoughtful, independent and informed analysis. For example, students will be continually encouraged to ask the following questions of any subject studied:

   a) How do we know what we know? What is the evidence?

   b) What are various points of view?

   c) How is it connected to other things?

   d) What difference does it make?

2. Time will be allotted to develop and articulate connections between subject studied and experience at internships.

3. Students will be continually involved in assessing the value and effectiveness of learning experiences and in assessing the effect of curriculum on themselves.

4. Writing will be a key component of most courses and activities, as writing is not only a vehicle to communicate information or prove learning, but an important element of the learning process itself.

At regularly scheduled sessions, held at least once a week, students will meet to process their experiences at internships. Specific assignments designed for particular internships or themes may be developed, but as basic tools to help students become fully engaged at internships and to help them make the most sense of their experiences, the following activities will be used:

1) Keeping and sharing a journal
2) Interviewing
3) Raising questions and searching for answers (possibly as the seed of a project, large or small)

One of the governing principals of the Metropolitan Corporate Academy is the empowerment of students through their involvement and investment in designing and implementing learning strategies and assessments. This process begins as soon as a student enters MCA. It is at this juncture that a student sees the difference between MCA and traditional settings. The student sees the possibilities of being part of a holistic educational setting where the learning modules of the first year relate to and prepare him/her for the experiential learning modules of the next years. More importantly, they will see the entire set of experiences preparing them for goals <u>they</u> have had a hand in setting.

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Strand III - RESOURCES RECRUITED TO AUGMENT Strands I - II
(Overlay)

Cities-In-Schools is committed to attracting a range of business, cultural, and health related resources and programs to MCA. These resources will serve to augment existing strands, e.g. students pursuing business/finance career path who are examining small business entrepreneurships might be exposed to a series of seminars on business start-up. This might be followed by the actual development of business on the school site.

TARGET POPULATION

The target population of Metropolitan Corporate Academy would be students identified as "at risk" (that is, not likely to succeed in large, traditional high schools) by junior high and middle school personnel. Following identification of likely candidates, orientation workshops would be held for parents and students.

Students exhibiting the following characteristics (Attendance Improvement/Dropout Prevention criteria) will be considered for admission to MCA to assure high risk students gain entry:

1. Students who over the course of the last year have failed one or two major subjects

2. Students whose reading level at the beginning of the ninth grade ranges between the 6th and 9th grade levels

3. Students who in the last semester were absent between ten and twenty times

After the implementation phase of the school (the intial four years), it is likely that the school could accept transfer students from other schools or could serve as a re-entry school for prior dropouts.

THE CITIES-IN-SCHOOLS SUPPORT AND ENRICHMENT MODEL

The Corporate Academy paradigm has been successful for many reasons. One of the most critical parts of that paradigm is the agressive, proactive involvement in the "whole" child by a team of professionals. That team, utilizing the Family Group structure, consists of teacher/advisor, HRA social workers, youth workers and health care provider. Each student has his/her own team monitoring academic, social and familial needs and progress. The Metropolitan Corporate Academy adds the experiential component to that team through the student's internship coordinator(s) and mentor. The team will work jointly to establish a plan for each student that may involve individual, group and family-centered counselling, health care, tutorials, incentives, career development activities as well as referrals to more specialized service providers.

Regularly scheduled family group meetings will be led by teachers/advisors and consist of no more than sixteen students. These meetings will have a "curriculum" designed to create a sense of community for our young adults through the open expression of needs, and mutual respect.

Enrichment and recreational opportunities will be a vital component of the Corporate Academy's approach to academic and behavioral problems. As the consistent, caring adults, the family group will design a comprehensive program to include cultural enrichment excursions, academic field trips, leadership development conferences and workshops, as well as recreational activities. Enrichment opportunities supported by a grant from the New York City Department of Youth Services and private sector contributions will be used to provide motivation and reward for school attendance and academic performance. Also this component will provide a much needed physical outlet while offering structured, positive leisure time activities to help ensure a constructive peer group environment. It is expected that these activities will be the incentives to limit the social pressures that might foster antisocial or self-destructive attitudes and behavior.

MISSION STATEMENT

To expose students to, and to engage students in, the collaborative resources of the academic, public and private sectors as so to best prepare those students to assume a responsible role in our society.

The Metropolitan Corporate Academy Graduate will:

- have developed a sense of self sculpted by exposure to experience in the business and cultural communities
- have developed an appreciation and respect for the multitude of cultures that define our society at large and our city in particular

- be able to develop personal and career goals and create strategies to achieve those goals

- have become empowered through involvement in the planning and implementation of his/her educational and personal goals.

Those educational and personal goals are the outcomes upon which learning modules, assessment techniques and learning acceleration are predicted. In order to accomplish this goal the collaborative model must be utilized internally as well. Just as experience and engagement are the keys to learning, team building and decision-making are the keys to governance. Each constituency must be invested and empowered in the educative process. To this end we are committed to providing each constituency the forum(s) for investment. The planning team shall be charged with determining the initial nature of those forums. Furthermore those forums shall be dynamic and thus subject to constant evaluation and change. The planning team shall also be charged with developing the four year overview of MCA as well as the opening curricula and assessment strategies. Finally, that planning team shall include staff members, collaborators, students and parents. Until such time as that team is in place the following shall serve as a blueprint for curriculum overview.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

One of the most critical constituencies is parents/guardians. In order to involve parents or legal guardians in a holistic view of education they must be engaged from the moment they enter MCA. It is at that time that they become aware of their importance to the Metropolitan Corporate Academy. It is at that time they become aware of the many ways they will be a part of their child's education and the educational well-being of every child.

The following is our Parental Involvement Strategy:

1. Goals of school and expectations of parental involvement. Clarified at Open Houses and intake interviews. Parents are expected to meet with teacher/advisors and guidance staff at least four times per semester.

2. Parents invited to participate in Curriculum Planning Team meetings. Meetings scheduled to conform to parents' work schedule.

3. Parents invited to take courses offered for GED, ESL to further their own careers.

4. Parents invited to participate in in-training modules offered by cooperating business concerns.

5. Parents encouraged to participate in Long-Range MCA Planning Team efforts.

6. Formulation of dynamic Parents Association.